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ABSTRACT

This article describes a sequence of marriage and family counseling courses offered within the context of a Masters program in counselor education. Following the rationale for the courses and a general program discussion, the seven courses in the family counseling sequence are enumerated and explained, including: (1) theories of family counseling; (2) advanced theories and methods; (3) supervised experience in marriage and family counseling; (4) research in marriage and family counseling; (5) a family counseling practicum; (6) a marriage and family counseling practicum; and (7) an internship in marriage and family counseling. An evaluation of the impact and advantage of this curricular sequence concludes the article. (NRB)

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A Family Counseling Sequence in Counselor Education

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The current popularity of family counseling is at least in part due to society's concern with the survival of the family unit. Evaluation of the 1978 census data shows a marked decline in the number of traditional nuclear family households (U.S. Census Bureau, 1978). Single parent families now number 8% of the population, working parents are 21%, while traditional nuclear families are only 13%. In an attempt to focus attention on this situation, world leaders declared 1979 as the Year of the Family, and 1980 as the Year of the Child. In the United States, professionals gathered in local and national meetings to develop position papers and recommendations, and to provide direction for the future. The results of these efforts may be less than satisfactory, but they do indicate the degree of concern felt by professionals and lay persons alike. A tangential effect of this concern is the increase in training opportunities in the family counseling field. Even a casual perusal of convention programs and workshop announcements indicates the increasing number now devoted to some aspect of family counseling. Hollis and Wantz (1980), in their survey and listing of counselor preparation programs see the addition of family counseling training experiences as a significant trend in the field. They conclude that:

> Data in the past three years have shifted toward preparing counselors for counseling within family settings. Institutions marked in 1980 data, compared to 1977, a higher percentage of program emphasis (14% to 4%) for families as client populations and a greater number of marriage and family counseling courses added (P. 26).

An example of a pioneering training program in a counselor education department is described by Piercy and Hovestadt (1980). They document the development of a doctoral training program at East Texas State University over a six year period. The current program consists of more than fourteen courses and

a dissertation in marriage and family counseling. The scope of the program appears to be broad with appropriate emphasis on clinical training and research experiences. This may well serve as a model for future program development at other institutions. This sequence is concerned primarily with doctoral level students, although others may take some of the courses. My primary concern has been the development of programs for masters degree students, or for those who wish a structured, postmasters experience. These individuals constitute the bulk of the student population in most, if not all counselor education programs. They will become the front line practicioners in the field. A relevant question might be: What types of programs with what sequence of courses are available for masters level students?

The counselor education department at Northeastern Illinois University has a typical program for school and non-school counselors. There are four M.A. programs with the newest being Community and Family Counseling. During the past five years, I have developed a specific sequence of courses in family counseling that is available for all students in the department, but particularly appropriate for those intending to work in non-school settings. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a description of this sequence.

General Program

The M.A. program consists of twelve courses totaling 36 semester hours. Basic courses in the core preparation areas of counseling total twenty-seven hours, with 9 hours of electives. These include counseling theory, counseling techniques (video tape lab course), group counseling (video tape lab course), and six semester hours of practicum.

Family Counseling Sequence

The family counseling courses are an elective sequence. Students may take one or more of seven available courses. However, those who take the maximum number will have extra credit hours beyond the M.A. degree. In order to begin the sequence, students must have completed all of the core counseling courses except the practicum. Additionally, the family courses must be taken in order, the previous course being a prerequisite for each succeeding one. All courses receive three semester hours of credit. The courses in sequential order are:

1. Theories of Family Counseling
2. Advanced Theory and Methods in Family Counseling
3. Supervised Experience in Marriage and Family Counseling
4. Research in Marriage and Family Counseling
5. Practicum I - Family Counseling
6. Practicum II - Marriage and Family Counseling
7. Internship in Marriage and Family Counseling

1. Theories of Family Counseling

This introductory course is available for all students in the department regardless of their program emphasis. It is a required course in the new Community and Family Counseling program. The focus of the course is on five models of family counseling, including theory and technique. The models covered are Communication Theory (Jackson, Satir, Haley), Systems Theory (Bowen), Structural Theory (Minuchin), Social-Learning Theory (Patterson), and Integrative (Walsh). The first four are considered to be seminal theories and thus provide a solid foundation for further study. The fifth model, the author's own, is an example of a blended theory. The format of the course is essentially 60% lecture and discussion, and 40% experiential. Every student is required to read the textbook, "A Primary In

Family Therapy" (Walsh, 1980), and one original work from the seminal models. Other required experiences are one session as a therapist with a role play family, and one session as a family member. Mid-term and final exams are also required. The introductory nature of this course is emphasized, and serious students are encouraged to gain further training by enrolling in advanced courses in the sequence or by attending institutes and workshops.

2. Advanced Theory and Methods in Marriage and Family Counseling

The second course is a continuation of the introductory course, and builds on the content of the first. The seminar format is utilized for maximum interaction. Students are required to choose one of the five models presented in the first course, and to broaden and deepen their understanding of it. The textbook, (Papp, 1977), is required reading. Every student chooses one of the twelve case studies and analyzes it according to their model. A summary of each analysis is written, distributed, and verbally presented to the seminar group. Another requirement is a library research project on some sub-topic in marriage and family counseling. The topics have been wide-ranging and include such diverse areas as counseling families with a depenendent or institutionalized senior citizen, sexual counseling for young parents, divorce counseling for adults and children, family counseling for new immigrants, and counseling families with handicapped members. Approximately 30% of the semester is devoted to viewing several full process video tapes of this author working with families. Each seminar member may also present one of their own cases (if they have one currently), and request feedback from the group. Student evaluation and feedback has indicated that this course gives them a realistic picture of family counseling, and prepares those who are interested for the next course in the sequence.

3. Supervised Experience in Marriage and Family Counseling

The third course is a limited enrollment experience. Only those students who

have demonstrated sufficient knowledge and competence are allowed to enroll. Maximum current enrollments have been five students per section. Each student has a full process co-counseling experience with the supervisor. The families have been referred to me, and consent to participate in a training setting. All sessions are video taped and critiqued by the entire group - supervisor and students. This allows each student to have a first-hand experience with one family, and second-hand involvement with four other families. So far, all the students have indicated that this is an intense experience that prepares them to work comfortably with families in a less-structured setting (i.e. internship, practicum, on-the-job).

4. Research in Marriage and Family Counseling

   This fourth course is entirely focused on the development and execution of a statistical research project. It culminates in a master's degree paper that is analagous to a thesis. A research project is required for all degree candidates. This course fulfills this requirement, and allows those interested in marriage and family counseling to focus on their primary area of interest, and to be directed by a faculty member knowledgeable in the area.

5. Practicum I - Marriage and Family Counseling

6. Practicum II - Marriage and Family Counseling

   These two courses are also required for the M.A. degree in all programs. The difference here is that qualified students may elect to focus more intensively on marriage and family counseling. They can be placed in a field setting that specializes in this area, and have a university supervisor who also specializes in marriage and family work.

7. Internship in Marriage and Family Counseling

   The final course is reserved for those few students who wish a prolonged field placement with university supervision and academic credit. The previous six

courses are prerequisites. Currently, only three students have progressed to this point in six years. It is anticipated that this will double in the next academic year.

Overview and Evaluation

Since I began offering the introductory course six years ago, 300+ students have completed the course. Course sections have a maximum enrollment of twenty-five, and none have been below fifteen. Approximately 50% of the students elect to take the second course. There is a corresponding drop of approximately 50% for the third course. Usually those students who persevere this far continue through the practicums and the research seminar. In terms of numbers, this means that 4 or 5 students can be expected to enroll each semester in the third and fourth courses. Those who want a family oriented practicum are absorbed into the regular practicum sections with selected supervisors. A very limited number of students request an internship.

The experience at Northeastern with this sequence has been positive. Because of the regular sequential nature of the offerings, many students (30% of degree candidates) are exposed to family counseling. Those students who wish further experiences can secure the advanced courses within the context of their M.A. program. For the majority of students, this means that they can complete their degree without additional cost or time involvement. Only a small number of students continue on a post-masters basis. For those students who already possess a degree and who are practicing counselors, the sequence provides a structured set of experiences to gain expertise in a specialty area without cutting deeply into personal/family time or budget. An added benefit is the possibility of job advancement or added income by obtaining specialized training.

The benefits for the counselor education program appear to be numerous, while the liabilities are few. At Northeastern, the sequence has proved to be cost ef-

ficient. New students have been attracted to the department and to the degree programs. This has meant an increase in credit hour production in other courses in the program without a corresponding rise in faculty salaries or support services. Approximately, seventy-five percent of one full time faculty load is devoted directly to the sequence in a twelve month period. Non-economic benefits have also been felt by the department. Student enthusiasm and commitment is high, local community agencies are eager to use our students, and the public relations factor of greater visability and recognition within and outside of the university has increased.

This presentation is intended as an example of a marriage and family counseling sequence in a counselor education program. The experience at Northeastern has been that the sequence is flexible enough to fit into an existing M.A. program, and to be cost effective in a tight budget situation. The content and sequencing of the courses appears to appeal to both casual and serious students of family counseling. It is a good recruiting and public relations factor. And finally, it appears to be generalizable in part or full to other counselor education programs around the country.

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